

# *“Do Not Forget Australia”*

*To Australia with love from the CM1 children of the  
École Victoria, Somme, France*



*Most Australians are aware of Gallipoli and the appalling loss of lives there. What is not so well known is Australia's role on the Western Front where the fighting continued for three times as long, and Australia suffered six times as many casualties. Jeanie Clark takes up the story...*

In Villers-Bretonneux, a small rural town in the Somme Valley in northern France, the locals perhaps know more about Australia's role on the Western Front than you do.

Last July a teacher there had a 'big' idea; for his class of 9-10-year-olds to create a film to:

- commemorate the centenary of the Australians 'saving' their town;
- acknowledge the gift of their school Ecole Victoria from children in Victoria, Australia;
- honour the Australian memorials in and near the town; and
- share the story of their 'devoir de Remembrance' (duty of remembrance).

So, from September until February, the children of CM1 class worked as a team to research and produce this beautiful film – a gift from the French children to Australians.

I have had the privilege of assisting M. Guillaume Fournet, in circulating “Do not forget Australia” as widely as possible.

Dear Australian friends,  
For the centenary of the Battle of Villers-Bretonneux and ANZAC Day, our class has produced a 25-minute-long documentary called DO NOT FORGET AUSTRALIA, the duty of remembrance in Villers-Bretonneux.  
The pupils and myself are extremely proud to present this film, which won the Sadlier-Stokes award in this centenary year! We will be given our prize on 25th April by an Australian personality: your Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull just after the commemoration at the Memorial!!!  
Watching the film, you will follow the pupils as they make moving discoveries: the Australian National Memorial, Adelaide Cemetery, the Franco-Australian Museum, the Victoria School...  
If you enjoy it, you are kindly asked to share it with your contacts, and with as many schools as possible. This will allow to highlight the work of our little French pupils of Villers-Bretonneux and participate in the duty of remembrance!  
With our kind regards,  
the pupils of the class of CM1 from the Victoria School and their teacher, Monsieur Fournet.

Here, I provide some suggestions to help others use this film to better know and understand Australia's actions at Villers-Bretonneux. If you do not know of this part of our history, this film is a delightful way to discover it. The work was recognised on Anzac Day by being awarded the 2018 Australian Embassy's Sadlier-Stoke Prize. I commend this (English sub-titled) film to you and your families.

### Some Western Front History

How can you introduce children to a war a century ago on the other side of the world? We see the beneficiaries of this and their perspective in this film.

*Imagine your community was overrun by a neighbouring country. Soldiers of another country from the other side of the world come to help and drive the invaders out.*

#### Why did Australian soldiers fight on the Western Front?

We were a part of the British Empire, so supporting England was considered our 'duty', part of who we were at the time. Australia had only just become a Federation in 1901, we wanted to show the world what we were made of!

After evacuating from Gallipoli, the survivors and reinforcements trained in Egypt. Most of the soldiers were then sent to the trenches of the Western Front to fight Germany while others stayed in the Middle East to fight the Ottomans (Turkey).

#### How did the soldiers get to the Western Front?

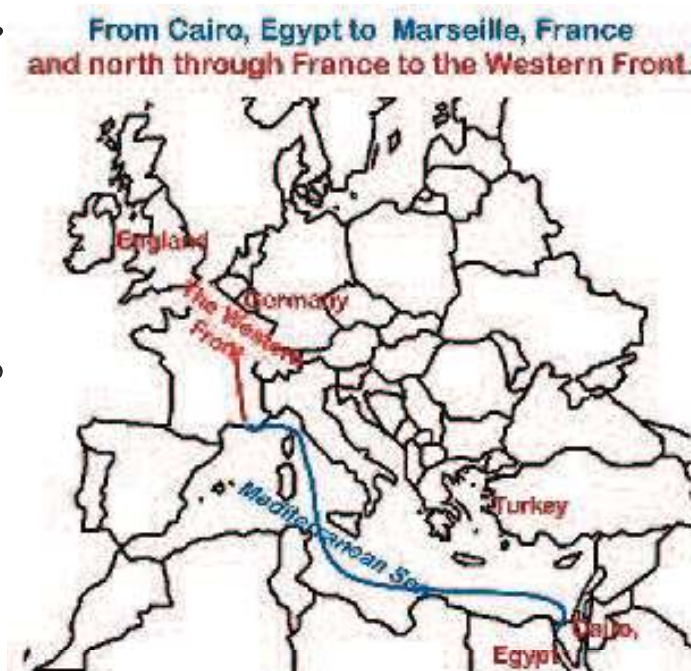
The film shows a neat straight line between France and Australia but it wasn't as simple as that. The soldiers travelled by troopship, mostly around to WA, then across the Indian Ocean, up the Red Sea, through the Suez Canal to Cairo, Egypt (see map left). It took about six weeks. After training, most then sailed over the Mediterranean Sea to Marseille, France, and then went by train north to the Western Front (see map below left). The Western Front ran from the English Channel to Switzerland, with many battlefields.

### The Second Battle of Villers-Bretonneux

Why are the Australian soldiers so revered in Villers-Bretonneux and Amiens? It is partly because of what happened in April 1918.

On the 24th April 1918, the Germans captured Villers-Bretonneux from the British, (dashed line

Comparison of Action			
	Gallipoli	Middle East	Western Front
Duration of action	Apr-Dec 1918	Mar 1916 - Oct+ 1918	Mar 1916- Nov+ 1918
Deaths	8,000	1,300	46,000
Source: Australian Army summaries			



© Maps by Jeanie Clark, 2018, from a public domain base.





Villers-Bretonneux were extremely grateful and vowed to remember the Australians forever. The largest German advance in France since 1914 had been stopped, mainly by

on the map below) however their main aim was the capture of the very important railway hub of Amiens, about 10km further west. If Amiens was lost, the British and French armies would have been split in two.

The situation was precarious and the Australian soldiers were brought in and told to immediately retake Villers-Bretonneux. Outnumbered and attacking in the dark without artillery support, they were not expected to succeed, but they did – surrounding the town and its important high ground (solid line on the map below), on Anzac Day 1918, losing 1,800 men. (see <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/history/conflicts/australians-western-front-19141918/australian-remembrance-trail/australian-5> ).

Although their town was in ruins, the people of

the Australians, although it took many more months of further hard fighting, and heavy losses, before the war ended on 11th November 1918.

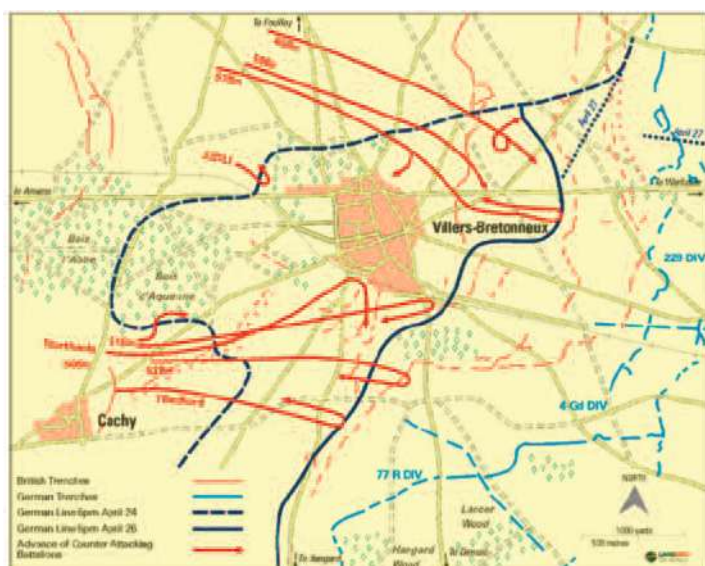
### The History of the School

Can you see what is written in big letters on the porch in the photo opposite? It has been there since 1927, when this primary school at Villers-Bretonneux was completed. Imagine being a part of a community where generations of children arriving and playing at school, see this message — and the same in French in the classrooms. You would be very aware that there is something special between you and Australia! So, what is it? This film explores those links from WW1.

It is hard for us to imagine our community being turned to rubble by fighting, but that is what happened to towns all over the Somme Valley, including Villers-Bretonneux. When the fighting stopped, where did the children go to school? In the 1920s, in Melbourne, a boy was concerned about this and he began a ‘Penny Drive’ to help rebuild one school at Villers-Bretonneux. The children of Victoria got behind this and raised enough money to build a school. It was named École Victoria (Victoria School).

Raising money to rebuild another’s school is an inspiring history that Victorian children should know and be proud of. And guess what? The École Victoria children returned the gift. When they heard of the Ash Wednesday bushfires in Victoria in 2009, they raised today’s equivalent of 2 pennies (1 Euro) per child to send to a destroyed school - Strathewan Primary School.

### Remembrance



<https://www.awm.gov.au/sites/default/files/exhibitions/1918/images/villiersmap.gif>

How do the French show their remembrance? Through their hospitality to Australian visitors, their ongoing care and respect for our cemeteries and the presence of memorials and museums. The second part of the film takes us to the Adelaide Cemetery on the edge of Villers-Bretonneux. It is impeccably kept as are all the war graves and memorials.

Next the children visit the Franco-Australian Museum. It sits above the school and has attracted so many Aussie visitors that it has been renovated by the Australian government in the last five years. It specialises in the history of our gallant Australian soldiers who saved their village. See <https://www.museeaustralien.com/en-au/home>

The film then moves to the Villers-Bretonneux Australian War Memorial. It shows the Somme Valley as the children walk out to memorial. Its walls (pictured above) are engraved with 10,000+ names of Aussie soldiers who died on the Western Front, but for whom no body was found to bury. There is also a cemetery here and some of the soldiers' stories are told.

### Sadlier and Stokes

The Sadlier-Stokes Prize is for projects which develop the Franco-Australian links from WW1. Who were Sadlier and Stokes? They were two soldiers from the Villers-Bretonneux battle of 24-25 April 1918 who were awarded medals for bravery.



*A mural at the Victoria School creates another link with Australia*

### Summary

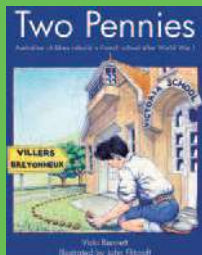
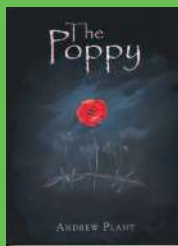
This French children's film reminds us of the importance of freedom and the fight to retain it, the generosity of children, and the importance of this (Second) Battle of Villers-Bretonneux in helping to end WW1 – something all Australians should be aware of.

I thank the people of Villers-Bretonneux and the Ecole Victoria for keeping their promise, their 'duty' to remember. Through their film we can better know, understand, remember and pass on what people a century ago began with their command: "Lest we forget!"

### Do not forget, Australia!

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## Resources



- The 'Do Not Forget Australia' film
- A two-min video on the Battle of Villers-Bretonneux and the rebuilding of the school 'Two Pennies 1918'
- The winning entry of the 2016 Sadlier-Stokes Award focusses on recounting the battle and the brave exploits of Sadlier and Stokes.
- Behind the news segment on Villers-Bretonneux
- French children raising money for a Victorian school after the 2009 bushfires
- Picture books:
  - *The Poppy* by Andrew Plant (about the environs, battle and memorials).
  - *Two Pennies* by Vicky Bennett (about the rebuilding of the school with money raised in Victoria).
  - *Do Not Forget Australia* by Sally Murphy and Sonia Kretschmar (links a French and Australian school child).
  - *The Promise – the town that never forgets: N'oublions jamais l'Australie* by Derek Guille sample available

